

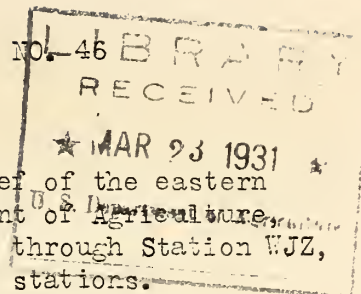
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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLY --



March 16, 1931

A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the eastern district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, broadcast Monday mornings at 10 o'clock, Eastern Time, through Station WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations.

Good morning, my radio friends, your representative of the Federal Food and Drug Administration comes to you this morning for the forty-sixth time to tell you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded by the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act, and to tell you how to read labels, in order that you may become careful, exacting, discriminating, and economical buyers.

Now for my story. Federal food and drug officials frequently have occasion to investigate the truth of medicine testimonials, printed in newspapers as advertisements, often with photographs of the individuals who claim to have been cured of serious diseases. Let me remark, in passing, that the advertiser does not often use such testimonials in the newspapers circulated in the territory where the patient who claims to have been cured, resides. Instead, for example, a testimonial of a western resident may be published in an eastern paper and one from a resident of the east may be published in a southern paper. Thus, their lack of authenticity and truthfulness does not often become a matter of local knowledge. I have in mind a testimonial advertisement, published in a New England paper, in which a lady claimed that she was cured of a serious disease. She said she had taken a certain nostrum on the advice of a certain physician, whom she named, and that this nostrum cured her. This lady lived in a small town in Alabama. We were there gathering evidence to prove fraud against that particular product, so I visited the doctor who was said to have prescribed the medicine and found him to be a leader of his profession in his locality. When I showed him the advertisement he was poignantly indignant and vehemently disclaimed ever having prescribed the medicine for any one. Indeed, he said he had visited the lady in question only once and at that time no mention of the nostrum had been made. This physician did know, however, that the woman did not have the disease from which she claimed to have been cured by the particular medicine. The physician was so much concerned over the misuse of his name that he offered to drive me out into the country to visit the testimonial giver. We went out to her home and found that she was a very poor and a very anemic woman. Upon questioning, she said that she had bought a bottle of the medicine and had taken it and that it had made her feel better. Let me say here, folks, that the medicine was very high in alcoholic content. The woman continued with her story saying that she was poor and could not afford to buy any more of the medicine, and so she conceived the idea that if she would write a nice letter to the company, perhaps they would give her some of the medicine free of charge. And so she wrote a nice letter to the company. She said that their medicine had cured her of a certain disease. Then she admitted she had never had that disease. She admitted also having said in the letter that her doctor So-and-So had prescribed the medicine. She said she added this in order to impress the medicine manufacturer. Of course, the medicine

manufacturer was pleased with the testimonial and promptly sent the lady a dozen bottles, express prepaid, without charge. Later, the doctor made a vigorous complaint to the medicine company for the untruthful, unwarranted, and misleading use of the name. They discontinued using that testimonial forthwith.

My friends, the Federal food and drugs act does not control advertisements, but only controls labels. Your food and drug officials, however, as I have said, often investigate testimonials in securing evidence to prove fraud. Many nostrums like those I have described have been proceeded against as being labeled with false and fraudulent medicinal claims. It is by actions such as these that the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act protects your food and drug supply.

My read-the-label subject for today is medicines. This is the third and final talk on this subject.

First, let me say that I intend no wholesale condemnation of the medicine business nor am I opposed to all self-medication, for there are a great many products which are useful as home treatments for simple ailments and as first aids, but practically all have very decided limitations. Many are entirely worthless. Some are dangerous. My remarks today will apply, as they did last week, only to the nostrums--- the ineffective, and worthless, and falsely and fraudulently labeled medicines.

Many medicines have their complete formulas on the label, but do not be misled in instances where an incomplete formula is given. Such a formula may give the names of some of the ingredients and may end by saying something like this--- "and other ingredients." Such a formula is almost as bad as no formula at all in so far as advising you of the character of the product is concerned, and a product so labeled is still a secret preparation. Reading the labels will help you to understand this.

Another form of misleading labeling purports to give the composition of the product on the label, but includes items in the list which are themselves fanciful and meaningless names.

Don't be misled my friends, by the size and arrangement of the type and printing on the label. The label may say that the medicine is useful in, recommended for, or is indicated in certain diseases, which will be named on the label. Even though qualifying statements may precede the list of diseases the very naming of them on the label may hold out promise of cure to those who have such diseases. This impression is sometimes furthered by a prominent display of the names of diseases, in large type.

Let me illustrate the misleading effect of prominent display of particular words on a label. Such a label may read, "shortens paroxysms of coughing in whooping cough". By using large type for the words "Whooping Cough", you may get the idea that the product is a competent treatment for whooping cough -- unless you read the label carefully.

Still again, we may have the misleading pictorial designs, such as pictures of human organs, on labels and these may give a false impression

that the product is curative for diseases of these organs. Pictures of a fat man and a lean woman, accompanied by the time-worn expression, "Before and after", give false assurances that the preparation is an effective reducing agent. The old, "I do", and, "I don't", gag accompanied by two pictures, one showing a man coughing, the other not, indicates that Jones cough drops will cure a cough. Do not take such pictorial representation seriously. Enjoy them if they are works of art, laugh at them if they are funny but otherwise, pay no attention to them.

The manufacturers may capitalize on favorable popular ideas of drug values, though the popular conception of the value of certain drugs may be just all wrong. Many persons believe celery is good for the nerves, but the truth is that the sale of celery compound for the nerves is monumental nonsense.

Then, again, you will find label representations such as, "To be used as directed by a physician", or, "To be used only on prescription". Such expressions are often placed on labels of products legitimately directed toward the profession. In numerous cases, however, such expressions are used to deceive the reader into inferring that the medicine is extensively used by the medical profession.

My friends, beware especially of mail-order fake medicines. Many such sale schemes include intricate follow-up systems, and if you get on a fake mail-order medicine's mailing list, you may receive letter after letter for extended periods making appeal after appeal for you to buy the product. Some of these schemes involve gradual reduction of the purchase price. An article offered to you in the first instance at \$5.00 a bottle may be offered, if you wait long enough, for as low as 50 cents a bottle, and when this offer comes it may be on the basis of a reward to get you interested in the product or as a reward if you will tell your friends about it and the like. The real idea is to get your 50 cents or how much have you.

My friends, the mail-order medicine business -- that is, the business of selling medicines by mail direct to consumers -- is permeated with fraud. The United States Post Office Department has proceeded to deny the use of the mails to hundreds of concerns engaged in fraudulent medicine business. The Federal food and drugs act has been repeatedly invoked against fakers of this sort. Many of the schemes for selling advertised medicines direct to the consumer through the mails, are very elaborate. I have in mind one concern which sold a preparation, through the mails, which employed one man to mix the medicine and 22 stenographers to carry on persuasive correspondence with sales prospects. This particular scheme involved the use of as many as 15 different follow-up letters, each making an appeal to the sick person to use the medicine. The medicine was worthless and the letters which went to prospective customers were cunningly devised and filled with false and fraudulent statements. Now let me tell you of a very pathetic case, which came to my attention within the last few weeks. One of my radio listeners wrote me a letter. It is dated January 25, 1931, and in this letter she said: "I have tuberculosis. I heard about a medicine", (and she gave me the name of the medicine), "and so another patient and myself wrote to the man selling it telling him about our condition. He wrote back, saying, for a thousand dollars each, he could cure us, but as we did not have that much we just bought the medicine as we needed

it, so each of us spent over \$120 on this medicine. I took it for 10 months getting worse all the time. The other patient died. He was taking it for one year. I am enclosing some of the literature the man sent us. I never knew how ridiculous it sounded until I heard you tell about a certain medicine." My friends, that is a part of the letter my radio listener sent to me. Let me read you some of the things from the circulars which the lady enclosed with her letter. It says "For the third time I am telling you that tuberculosis and cancer can be cured." Note, "for the third time." This must be one of those follow-up schemes. You should note, too, that a picture of the bottle of medicine which this individual wishes to sell appears on the same circular. Now listen to what else it said: "Health, and what is it worth to you? Health that literally sings and tingles as it surges through the veins, health that makes each day a glowing new experience. We have it for sale." This is the kind of exaggeration, this is the kind of fraud, this is the kind of bunk, that I have been telling you about for the last three weeks in my talks about fraudulent medicines.

My correspondent enclosed another circular put out by the same concern. This circular shows a picture of the man who sells this medicine holding a bottle of it in each hand and this circular reads: "Science is knowing how, what and when to do." Then follows a brief description of the discoveries of Robert Koch, Roemer, Harvey, Jenner, then there is a statement about consumption being deadly and a reference to sleeping sickness. I suppose the inference to be drawn is that the individual whose picture is shown on the circular is to be classed with the scientists to whom he refers, for under the picture is the statement that it represents "the only man living or who ever has lived, who will furnish remedy, and nurse, and guarantee to cure tuberculosis." There appear on this circular also, pictures of two bank checks. What their significance is would have to be determined by deduction, but I suppose they are intended to impress the prospective customer with the validity of the guarantee. And the best is yet to come. At the bottom of the circular appears this phrase "Any person claiming to be a doctor and cannot cure tuberculosis and cancer is a quack and a grafter." Isn't that amusing? My friends, this circular illustrates practically everything that I have told you in my three talks on reading labels on patent medicines. We have the science feature, we have the guarantee feature, we have the bombast feature, we have the misleading inference feature, and we have the pictorial representation feature. My friends, if you will read labels as I have tried to teach you to read labels it will be apparent to you the minute you lay eyes on a circular of this kind that it is fraudulent.

I want to ask all of the members of my radio audience who have been victims of fake medicine mail-order frauds to write me the details of same and to send me all letters and literature that they may have received in the course of such victimization.

A great deal of capital is made by some members of the fake medicine fraternity of claims made that their nostrums are purely vegetable, that they are composed of plant drugs. Let me tell you that only a few of the vegetable or plant drugs have any particular value as affecting serious diseases, and those that do have value are powerful and dangerous.

Many medicines make an appeal to the laity's need of iron in the system. Some claim that their tonics are valuable because of their iron constituent. Do not be misled by labels or advertisements saying that "you need iron for your system." Remember that if you eat a varied diet you will get iron from fresh vegetables, from which it is best assimilated.

Many medicine labels may be in themselves perfectly clean of any false or fraudulent statements, but you may find on the label a statement suggesting that you write to the manufacturer for further information. When you do, you will get a vast amount of advertising matter in the form of booklets and circular and whatnot, in which false and fraudulent claims of curative effects may be made with abandon. Now the Federal food and drugs act prohibits false and fraudulent claims of curative effect on labels, but it does not control any advertising matter not shipped with the package. It is for this reason that you find in newspapers, magazines, bill boards, on calendars, and display advertising of various kinds, statements about products which are much broader and more definite than those which are found on labels. Compare the statements on labels with those made in advertisements, and if you find the advertisements exceeding in their claims of curative value and effect those that appear on labels, then guide yourself by the label alone and look with suspicion on the product itself.

Let me suggest that you read labels carefully and properly evaluate any statements on labels which indicate the limitations of the products. For example, a product may be labeled, "for simple cold", or, "for simple headache". A mixture of jimson weed and saltpetre which will produce fumes when burned, may be advertised as an asthma remedy. It will probably be labeled "for the paroxysms of asthma". Such a product may be expected to alleviate the acute symptoms. It would have no effect on the course of the disease itself. It would not lessen the frequency of the spasms. The labeling "For the paroxysms of asthma" expresses the product's field of usefulness and its limitations. The advertising "Asthma Remedy" creates a false impression and holds out to the purchaser a promise which the article cannot fulfill.

Another important matter for the label readers is to read directions carefully and follow them. This is exceedingly important. You may be dealing with potent drugs, with dangerous drugs, and if you take quantities in excess of prescribed doses, you assume full responsibility.

Now in conclusion, my friends, I want to urge you to read medicine labels carefully and critically, to exercise judgment and knowledge, remembering always that the manufacturer of worthless nostrums must sell his goods or else he cannot stay in business. Remember that he has a selfish interest in making you lurid promises on his labels and in advertisements. Remember the danger that may result either from the product itself directly, or from the delays which will occur while you are taking it when you might have been receiving rational treatment for your disorder.

My friends, I have set out deliberately to teach consumers how to read labels. I have no other concern or reason except to be of service to

you. I am trying to tell you the whole truth in order that you may be benefited thereby and in order that you may select products with safety, discrimination, and with economy.

Would you like a copy of my talk today? - Would you like copies of my previous talks? - The Department of Agriculture has arranged to supply you for the asking with copies of all of my read-the-label talks. All you have to do is to write to:

W. R. M. WHARTON, United States Department of Agriculture, 301 Varick Street, New York City.